



COVID-19 Testing in Schools Program: Parent Frequently Asked Questions

Why is COVID-19 testing being done at my school?

To slow the spread of COVID-19 in North Carolina and to protect teachers, staff, students, and their families, K-12 public schools can get COVID-19 tests through the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS).

Making it easy for our students, families, and staff to get tested helps our schools safely and confidently continue in-person learning. Testing helps us more easily detect the virus and take quick action to keep it from spreading.

With vaccines now available, is testing still necessary?

Yes. Many of our students are not yet able to get the vaccine, because it is only available to people 12 and older. Therefore, COVID-19 testing is an important way to protect our school community. [Studies](#) have shown that weekly testing of all students, teachers, and staff can reduce by half the number of people who get COVID-19 in school.

CDC and NCDHHS also recommend that anyone with COVID-19 symptoms, even if they are vaccinated, should get tested.

Getting vaccinated (YourSpotYourShot.nc.gov), participating in school testing, and practicing commonsense prevention methods will build a strong defense against the spread of COVID-19 and keep our schools as safe as possible for in-person learning.

How does the school testing program work?

NCDHHS is supplying access to COVID-19 tests at no cost to North Carolina public school districts and charter schools that choose to participate. It is an expansion of successful [pilot program](#) launched in December 2020. To offer testing, school districts must have a process to get a parent or guardian's consent, have enough personal protective equipment on hand, either have trained personnel give tests or partner with a local health provider, and report test results to the local health department.

If a student or staff member is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, they should not come to school. Please use ncdhhs.gov/TestingPlace to find nearby testing.

Please contact your child's school to learn more about how COVID-19 testing works in your school.

What kind of COVID-19 test is used at school?

In most cases, COVID-19 rapid antigen tests are being used in K-12 North Carolina public schools in the spring 2021 testing program. These tests use small nasal swab to collect a sample from the lower part of your nose. The tests give results in about 15 minutes.

Please see questions below for more information about COVID-19 antigen tests. More information about the specific COVID-19 tests being used is available at <https://www.abbott.com/BinaxNOW-Test-NAVICA-App.html>

Does my child need to be tested if they have received a COVID-19 vaccine?

Currently only people over the age of 12 are eligible to be vaccinated. People who are fully vaccinated only need to get tested if they have COVID-19 symptoms. People are fully vaccinated two weeks after their final COVID-19 vaccine dose. Learn more at YourSpotYourShot.nc.gov.

What is a COVID-19 rapid antigen test?

Instead of waiting for results to come back from a lab, a COVID-19 rapid antigen test, or “COVID-19 rapid test”, allows a person to get their results more quickly than traditional testing. For example, the rapid antigen tests being used in the spring 2021 testing program give results in about 15 minutes.

The quick turnaround of rapid antigen testing results helps us more easily detect COVID-19 and take quick action to keep it from spreading in our schools. In some instances, a student or staff member will need to take an additional type of COVID-19 test, which is called a PCR test, and get verified results from a lab. This additional layer of testing is necessary when a student or staff member:

- Tests positive for COVID-19 using a rapid antigen test; or
- Is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, even though the rapid antigen test was negative.

What is the difference between a COVID-19 rapid antigen test and a PCR test?

COVID-19 rapid antigen tests work to detect proteins in the body that are specific to COVID-19. The rapid antigen test used in school testing can give results within 15 minutes.

COVID-19 PCR tests detect the genetic material (RNA) that is specific to COVID-19. A PCR test can detect the virus within days of infection and is generally more reliable than a rapid antigen test, even for people who are not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. PCR test results can take 2-3 days as the tests are analyzed in a laboratory, but results can be done in as little as 24 hours.

People with COVID-19 symptoms and a negative COVID-19 antigen test should get a PCR test to confirm the negative results.